

## EARLY HISTORY OF GRIDLEY

From the date of its beginning, 1870, until 1906 the little town of Gridley was surrounded by huge fields of grain - wheat, oats, and barley. There was no irrigation and thus no diversified farming.

The town itself, a speck on the map of California, numbering less than 2000 souls, was first made possible by the arrival of the Oregon and California Railroad - later the Western Pacific and now the Southern Pacific. Gridley is located near the southern boundary of Butte County, adjacent to Sutter County, 70 miles north of the state capital, Sacramento. The railroad established a station there in the early 1870's. The right-of-way of the railroad, running north and south, ran through the city's limits. Gridley was incorporated in 1906.

In August of 1902, a group of far-sighted men had proposed a canal system that would tap the Feather River and flow westward toward Gridley to irrigate the dry farms. This would change the emphasis from grain farming to diversified farming dependent on irrigation. Crops such as alfalfa, clover, beans, beets, orchards of fruits and nuts could thus be grown on much smaller acreages for the support of farm families.

By June 9, 1905, the Butte County Canal Company, after starting to dig on April 4, 1904, had completed fourteen miles of main canal from the Hazelbusch headgates and weir on the Feather River northeast of Gridley at a cost of \$200,000.

Between 1902 and 1904, agents for the canal company and the California Irrigated Land Company had signed up contracts with farmers around Gridley to supply irrigation water for lands that previously had been "dry-farmed."

The land company subdivided the lands formerly planted to large tracts of grain into "colonies," with tracts of irrigated farms in acreages of ten, twenty or forty acres. The emphasis on crops changed from raising grain to raising such irrigated crops as fruit, alfalfa and row crops. Pastures of clover also made possible a thriving dairy industry.

The Oroville Mercury, in April 1904, announced in most jubilant fashion the following predictions resulting from the opening of south Butte County's lands to irrigation:

"The completion of the Butte County Canal will bring in a large population of small farmers who do so much to add to the wealth of a community. In a few years we will see

Gridley and Biggs (five miles north of Gridley) increase 500 percent in population. With water in quantity and its fertile soil, southwestern Butte County and eastern Sutter will become one of the richest sections in the world."

The California Irrigated Land Company advertised throughout the intermountain country of Nevada, Idaho and Utah and throughout the middle west on the subject, "The Place Where Crops Never Fail," meaning the irrigated lands around Gridley.

On June 9, 1905 the canal project was completed and water was turned into the canal system out of the Feather River three miles east of Gridley. Hence the foundation was laid for the coming of the Mormons, who were skilled in farming irrigated lands.

With the completion of the main canal and its three main laterals near Gridley, plus the dissemination of all the promotional materials sent far and wide, it is no wonder that the Butte County Canal Company's irrigable lands became the object of attention for many visitors seeking to settle in the Gridley area.

The Gridley Herald in its April 13, 1906 issue, stated that a group of Mormons from Utah had arrived to look over the irrigated lands of Gridley. The editor stated that the visitors, who were farmers, were favorably impressed with what they saw.

In Utah these farmers had paid \$25 per acre for a water right plus \$2.50 per acre rental charge per acre per year. In Gridley they found that water cost just \$1.00 per acre. In addition, the climate was much more temperate than that of the intermountain region, making the California farms suited for a much wider diversification of crops than the Mormons had available to them in their homes of origin.

It was from this interest in irrigated farming at moderate costs that led to the migration of many Mormon farmers and their families from Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Nevada and other states to the Gridley area.

Hyrum Dewsnap had come to Gridley in the early autumn of 1906, hoping to find a more salubrious climate to improve his health. The diversity of crops including fruits, nuts, vines, row crops and pastures impressed him immensely. He returned to his Idaho home to show his family and fellow Mormons the samples of farm produce from the Gridley region.

So it was that on November 22, 1906, Latter-Day Saints arrived in Gridley from the Rexburg, Idaho area. These church members



were Hyrum Dewsnap, Charles French, Samuel Smith, O.T. Shirley, Henry Losser, Mathew White, W. Simmons, George Cole, his wife, Julia, and their children Louis, James, Elizabeth and Arthur.

An agent of the California Irrigated Land Company, a Mr. Frieling, accompanied this group to Gridley. His company was interested in the sale of lands near Gridley to these new arrivals in farming tracts of irrigated farms ten to forty acres in extent.

Through this land company agent, the group took an option on all of the land in Colonies No. 4 and No. 7, which made up a total of 722 acres. Individuals in this first contingent of Mormon settlers bought farms located south

and southwest of Gridley and began practicing diversified farming. The parcels not taken up by these first settlers were soon sold to other Latter-Day Saint families who began to arrive shortly afterward.

The March 1, 1907 issue of the Gridley Herald printed the following item: "Several carloads of household goods, stock and tools of the Idaho colonists arrived on the rails last week and the Idaho crowd now numbers 150 people. Joseph Cameron has completed his home and Monday moved into it." Throughout the year of 1907, the Gridley Herald regularly announced the arrival of Mormons, either to look things over or to settle in the colonies. (They are mentioned by name, not by religion.)

### EARLY CHURCH ACTIVITIES

The George Cole family, which had come to Gridley with the first group of colonists on Nov. 22, 1906, had moved into a house on Kentucky St. in Gridley. It was in this house that the Latter-Day Saints held their first Sacrament Meeting Dec. 10, 1906. It being the home of George Cole, he presided. Meeting was opened with singing, prayer and another song. The sacrament was administered and passed. The rest of the time was devoted to testimony bearing. It was a spiritual meeting and greatly enjoyed by those present. The group consisted of George Cole, his wife, Julia, his children, Louis, James, Elizabeth and Arthur, C.L. French and his son Vandy, Mathew White and his wife, O.T. Shirley and W. Simmons. Except for short periods of flu and diphtheria epidemics, Sacrament Meeting by the Latter-Day Saints have been held in the Gridley area continuously from 1906 to the present day.

About the first of January (1907) the meeting place was changed to the home of Samuel Smith since the Cole family was expecting the stork which arrived Jan. 19th 1907 and left twins.

On Feb. 5th, Joseph E. Robinson, California Mission President, made a visit, at the suggestion of the First Presidency of the Church, and met with the Saints. The purpose of this visit was to look the situation over and make a report.

President Robinson returned Feb. 23rd with Elder Thompson and Elder Grant. Sunday, Feb. 24th, meeting was held in the Gridley Opera House on Ohio Street, now occupied by the Gridley Furniture Store, and the Gridley

Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was organized. George Cole was sustained as president of the new branch with J. Frank Dewsnap as first counselor and Charles W. Larsen as second counselor.

Several of the first Mormon families coming to Gridley rented houses inside or near Gridley before selecting their farms in the colonies, where they built their permanent homes. Many of these homes in the colonies are still occupied today, seventy-two years later, often by the descendants of those colonists of 1907.

Some families built tent platforms with wooden sides to make the tents weatherproof through the winter. These temporary homes were placed under oak trees on the newly purchased farms.

In March of 1907, after heavy rains, the Biggs and Gridley areas were flooded with overflow water from the Feather River. The Mormon colonists who were living temporarily in houses in Gridley were inconvenienced by the waters invading their homes along with the rest of the residents of Gridley.

Because the flood waters backed up against the east side of the raised railroad right-of-way that passed through Gridley, the flood was most severe on the east side of the right-of-way, affecting the homes on East Hazel and Washington Streets. The railroad tracks north of Gridley were washed out. This permitted the waters to rush through, flooding the main business sections of both Gridley and Biggs. In Gridley, a lake was created in the Veatch tract and Parkside addition north and southwest of the city's limits.

In 1907, the Branch was visited by Apostle



Richards and President Joseph F. Smith. The visitations of the church president and the apostle were extremely helpful in raising the morale of the colonists who felt isolated from their fellow religionists in Idaho, Utah and Arizona.

Sunday School, Relief Society and probably M.I.A. were organized Nov. 17, 1907. Those sustained in leadership positions in these auxiliary organizations were: George W. Tolley, Sunday School Superintendent with M. Hansen and Charles W. Larson as counselors, Lillis Minerva Cameron, Relief Society President with Emily Dewsnap and Julia Cole as counselors, Caroline Allstrom, Y.W.M.I.A. President with Laura Dewsnap (now Richins) and Almira Peal as counselors. (At this time we are unable to determine the Y.M.M.I.A. presidency.)

The Primary was not organized until 1909. Lydia Barrow was the first president. (The first Primary president in northern California.)

Church services continued to be held in the Gridley Opera House during 1907 and 1908. The building was rented and Sunday School, Sacrament Meeting and M.I.A. were held there on Sunday. It was not a good place to meet but the best available.

At the close of the year, 1908, the Branch had grown in numbers until there were close to 500 Saints. In addition to those who settled on farms in what was known as Colony 4, many of the Latter-Day Saints settled in or just outside Gridley. One example of this was the Albert Taylor Family. Albert Taylor owned a large general store in the building that still stands on the southwest corner of Hazel and Vermont Streets, immediately north of the Church chapel that was built on the corner of Sycamore and Vermont Streets. Other members also had business interests in town. The Branch was growing fast and the people felt the need to have a building of their own.

Some contention arose among the Saints on the building site of the church. A portion of the membership wanted the church building erected in the Colony (Colony 4). Others wanted to build the church inside the city limits of Gridley. This was the cause of considerable ill feeling among some of the Saints.

It was finally decided to build the church inside the city limits and a hall (Social Hall) out in Colony 4. Because the Gridley Opera House was such a poor place for church meetings, it was decided to build the hall as soon as possible in order to have a place in which to hold church services.

About twenty acres was acquired and the Social Hall was built near the center of the tract, between Dewsnap and French Avenues. What is now Social Hall Road was used for access. Seven acres to the north of the building and eight acres to the south were later sold to Samuel A. Barrow.

During the spring and early summer of 1909, services were held under the big oak trees on the site of the building. Planks were used for seating.

George W. Tolley, then Branch President, a carpenter and contractor, was in charge of construction and labor was donated by the Saints. When the building was partly finished, meetings were held in the hall, the first one being on Sunday, July 4, 1909.

It was one large room with curtains hung from wires that could be used to divide it into classrooms. Heat was supplied by a wood burning stove in the middle of the room. This is reputed to be the first Church owned building in all of California.

The church in town was built on the north west corner of Sycamore and Vermont Streets. George W. Tolley was in charge of the construction of this building also. It was completed in 1912.

Funds for the new chapel were raised by the members, plus the liberal assistance of friendly business people and citizens of Gridley. Many members donated labor. The total cost of construction amounted to \$12,000. The Church headquarters in Utah, as was the custom, paid one half of the cost.

This structure was built to seat 1000 persons. In 1912, this was the largest house of worship belonging to the Latter-Day Saints west of Salt Lake City. The Gridley Branch made up the largest group of members of any branch of Latter-Day Saints in the extreme west.

The building's main entrance faced south on Sycamore Street. Sidewalks along the south and north walls led to the other two entrances into the west wing. A great-used drinking fountain was erected at the entrance to the west wing, adjacent to the lawn and the church sidewalk.

The huge chapel was built in the shape of a "T". The main congregation faced the west wall and pulpit from their seats in the stem of the "T". The top of the "T" contained the south and north wings for extra seating at conference time. On these occasions, huge throngs gathered to hear the Church General Authorities, Mission President and visiting missionaries in attendance. The platform



against the west wall of the top of the "T" seated the presiding officers, the guest speakers and recording clerk. The choir was often seated as a group at the north end of the platform, facing the congregation diagonally from the front of the north wing.

The central aisle, leading from the front entrance cloakroom, was laid out from east to west to the platform and the pulpit. It was carpeted and terminated at the Sacrament table.

The benches or pews in the church were of massive construction in solid oak. The walls of the church were made of stamped metal with the fleur-de-lis pattern common in the metal walls of public buildings of that era.

A huge coal or wood burning stove in the central part of the church warmed the congregation - especially those clustered in close proximity to this source of heat in a sometimes chilly church.

At the time of the construction of the Mormon chapel in 1912, the congregation had grown from the original colonists of 1906 to between six and seven hundred members. Newcomers, members of the church, were continuing to arrive from Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Canada, Mexico and further east.

The Latter-Day Saints of that period, just as now and just as in the days of the early Utah pioneers, believed in wholesome recreational activities. Hence, the celebration of Pioneer Day on the 24th of July, the day that Brigham Young and the Mormon pioneers first looked down on the great valley of the Great Salt Lake from a gap in the Wasatch Range as they came westward - and Brigham Young stated, "This is the place," - has always been an annual event in the social program of the Mormon Church.

Although the Gridley Mormon colonists observed their first Pioneer Day at the Wickman ranch, in successive years the momentous day was celebrated at the Social Hall.

Contests of all kinds were held in the yard under the oak trees. Youth of all ages, from children to teen-agers and past, enjoyed all kinds of races - sack races, three-legged races and wheel-barrow races. Sprints, broad and high jumping and relays were also popular. Declamations, recitations and dramatic productions were offered. A dance was usually held in the evening.

From the July 25th, 1935 Sacramento Bee: "When Gridley Mormons Observed Pioneer Day". "Members of the Mormon faith to the

number of several thousand from Gridley, Oroville, Yuba City, Nevada City, Corning and Colusa assembled in Gridley yesterday to observe Pioneer Day, the Eighty-eighth anniversary of the arrival of the Mormons in the Great Salt Lake Valley of Utah. A parade with entries reminiscent of the equipment and types of people who made the overland trek from the Missouri River to Salt Lake was a feature. The pictures show some of the participants in that and the sham battle that climaxed the parade." The pictures show covered wagons drawn in a circle in the Gridley Ball Park, as sometimes were those of the participants' forebears as a means of repelling Indian attacks. The mounted Indians are seen circling the wagons during the sham battle. Another picture shows Misses Alice and LaPriel Turnbaugh of Gridley, shown in their pioneer costumes as they appeared in the parade. Also shown is one of the handcars similar to those used by some of the Mormon immigrants to transport their property across the plains.

An article appeared in the Gridley Herald concerning the Pioneer Day Celebration on July 24th, 1936 entitled "Pioneer Day Celebration Decided Success; Hundreds Witness Parade, Pageant". The article goes on as follows: "The second annual Pioneer Day celebration by the Gridley Stake, Latter Day Saints church, is an event of the past and the sponsors are being congratulated on the success of the occasion.

The parade which extended for a number of blocks was appropriate to the occasion, with a dozen covered wagons, a handcart section, pioneers in 1847 garb riding in wagons, pushing handcarts or "in line".

Several entries were especially good. Dimon Stewart as an Indian squaw probably received the most attention. His father, R.E. Stewart, scored as a bearded pioneer with the handcart division.

The pageant in the ball park was witnessed by a crowd which filled the grandstand to capacity. The spectacle was divided into two parts. Old-time music was made audible to the spectators by the Ambrose loud speaker. A brief history of the famous Mormon trek of 1847 was also given by the announcer.

Hundreds crowded the sports program at the pool in the afternoon. Various formations were effected by the swimmers, chief among which were the Red Cross emblem and the letter "M" for Mormon Pioneer. In addition there were swimming and diving exhibitions and contests, directed by Mrs. Etta Todd. The



water program was held in conjunction with the Red Cross swimming school and pins were awarded beginners and swimmers successfully passing tests required.

The celebration concluded in the evening with a dance at Social Hall, well attended.

Editor's Note - The celebration, as celebrations go, was quite successful. Considerable effort and time was required to get together the wagons, hand carts, costumes and other features necessary to supply the parade color. Individuals and committees taxed muscle and brain to make the celebration the decided success that it was. However, with Gridley wards alone having a congregation estimated at more than 1000, it seems that the Latter Day Saint people have an opportunity on Pioneer Day to enlarge features of the event to a point that the celebration would be an outstanding event in the state, one that would attract spectators from near and far. Hundreds should have been in the parade, instead of scores. It has been suggested by the businessmen themselves that it would be a splendid idea to close business establishments for two hours and the community in general either take part in the parade or get on the sidelines. Co-operation between the Latter Day Saint people and the community should make the 1937 celebration a much larger spectacle.

Before the erection of the church in town, church members living in town had to make their way on foot or by horse and buggy to the Social Hall to attend church services - either Sacrament meeting or meetings of the auxiliaries of the Church. The roads were muddy, often nearly impassable. In summer, rutted and dusty roads had to be negotiated in order to reach services at the Social Hall. After its erection, the situation was reversed. Those living in the outlying area had the same problem attending meetings at the Vermont and Sycamore location. Hence a movement was initiated to organize a second Sunday School and Relief Society and meetings were held at both locations but everyone attended Sacrament Meeting in the church in town.

A Sunday School had also been organized in Biggs. They met in a rented building but it was discontinued by 1913.

January 1, 1920 the Liberty Branch was organized as a separate entity. Joseph W. McMurrin, President of the California Mission presided. Joseph Davis was sustained as Branch President with J. Frank Dewsnap and Ray E. Stewart as his counselors.

The name "Liberty" was proposed by Brother Frank A. Little of the Colony group as the name of the new branch and this was approved. The Branch consisted of those meeting in the Social Hall and it was retained as their meeting place.

During the presidency of Joseph Davis, the Social Hall was remodeled. At the east end a basement with a stage immediately above it was constructed. The concrete for the basement was not waterproof, however, and each winter water would seep into the basement, rendering it unuseable. On the west end, rest rooms were added. The basement was divided into four class rooms with sliding doors. These improvements made the hall much more practical and convenient.

The chapel in town was also remodeled. During the presidency of James M. Pryde, major changes were made. The huge one-room chapel was divided to create a smaller chapel and a recreation hall (cultural hall). Thus provision was made for social dances, parties, banquets, etc. Also, a curtained stage was built at the north end of this recreation hall with side wings, dressing rooms and lavatories. Many dramatic productions were offered through these facilities. A completely equipped kitchen below the stage made provision for food preparation for banquets. In the chapel portion, a balcony and upstairs class rooms were constructed. Other changes were included and minor remodeling occurred from time to time but it was not until the early 1920's that a baptismal font was constructed.

Following the alteration of the big Gridley chapel in 1923, church services continued as usual in the remodeled smaller chapel. Because of this alteration in the building, accommodations for an original congregation of 1,000 persons was considerably curtailed. There had been much soul-searching among the members of the congregation at the time when plans for walling off the west portion of the building to serve as a recreation hall were discussed, with much opposition from many of the older, more conservative members.

**The above 5 pages were prepared by Joseph Magee and printed by the Gridley Reunion Committee, History Of The LDS Church in the Gridley Calif Area(Gridley,CAMcDowell Printing 1980**

# REFLECTIONS

A History of  
Sacramento California Stake  
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
1934-1995

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Compiled and Edited by

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### The Gridley Colony

A group of Latter-day Saints settled in Gridley in 1906. These members were in the California Mission as were those in the Sacramento area. Activities between the two groups were intertwined until 1934 when stakes were formed in both Gridley and Sacramento at a conference in Homestead Ward, Sacramento. Gridley Stake was created in the morning session and Sacramento Stake in the afternoon session, making them the fourth and fifth stakes in California. Because of this association and because it continues the story of the Church in early California, this brief history of the Gridley colony is included.

The California Irrigated Lands Company, with headquarters in San Francisco, began a nationwide advertising campaign to sell plots of land around Gridley. Their advertisements were enthusiastic and promising. This advertising campaign was highly successful, as hundreds of Mormons from Utah and Idaho responded to the stories and pictures of rich fertile land with irrigation. On November 22, 1906, twelve individuals from Rexburg, Idaho, were the first LDS to arrive in Gridley. They were so pleased with what they found that they returned for their families. They settled in what the land company called Colonies 4 and 7, comprising 722 acres.

Just two weeks after arriving, the Mormons met in the home of George Cole on Kentucky Street for the first Church meeting. Present were Mr and Mrs. George Cole and children, Louis, James, and Elizabeth; C. L. French and son Vandy; Mr. and Mrs. Matthew White; O. T. Shirley, and W. Simmons. This was the beginning of an almost unbroken stream of Mormons to settle in Gridley. By March 1907 there were 150 members of the Church in Gridley.

On February 5, 1907, President Joseph E. Robinson of the California Mission visited Gridley to meet with the Saints and to make a report to the First Presidency of the Church. He returned

on Sunday, February 24, and organized the Gridley Branch, with George Cole as president; J. F. Dewsnap and Charles Larson, counselors. This organizational meeting was held in the Gridley Opera House on Ohio Street.

After the first year, meetings were held in the home of Samuel Smith.

Gridley Saints began thinking about a building of their own, and a site in Colony Number 4, in an outlying area where many of the Saints had settled, was selected. Work on the Social Hall, begun in 1908, was completed in 1909, the second Church-owned building in California, the first being the combination Church-schoolhouse built by John Horner in Centerville.

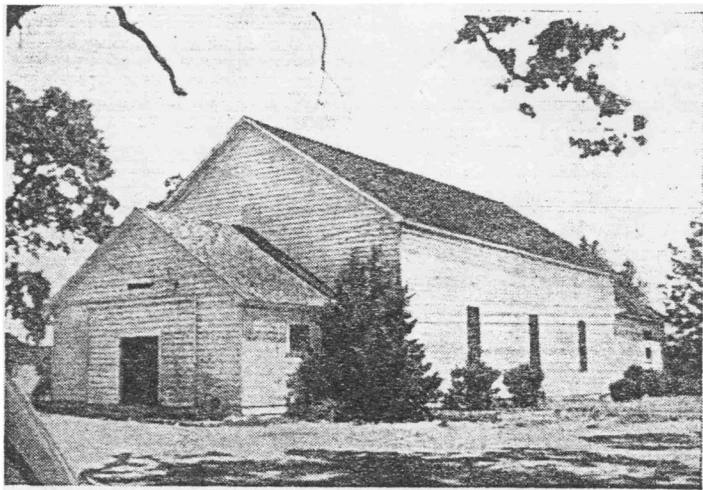
Building the Social Hall made demands upon the time and finances of the struggling colonists, who made many sacrifices. By 1912, under the direction of Branch President George Tolley, the Vermont-Sycamore Street chapel was erected in Gridley. Sunday School was held in both places, but sacrament meetings were held in the Gridley chapel.

On January 1, 1920, under Mission President Joseph W. McMurrin, the Gridley Branch was divided, with a new Liberty Branch being created. Both buildings were used, with the Gridley Branch meeting in the chapel and the Liberty Branch in the social hall. The Gridley building had no recreation hall. In 1923, under Branch President James M. Pryde, the building was remodeled to its present status.

On November 4, 1934, the Gridley Stake was organized, with John C. Todd, president. Gridley and Liberty branches became wards. This was done at the same time Sacramento Stake was organized, and took place in Sacramento. Both Sacramento and Gridley were in the Sacramento-Gridley District of the California Mission. Gridley Stake was created in the morning session of conference, making it the fourth stake in California and the 107th stake in the Church.



**First  
LDS  
Chapel  
Built  
In  
Calif**



*Social Hall Built 1909*

**Gridley, California**